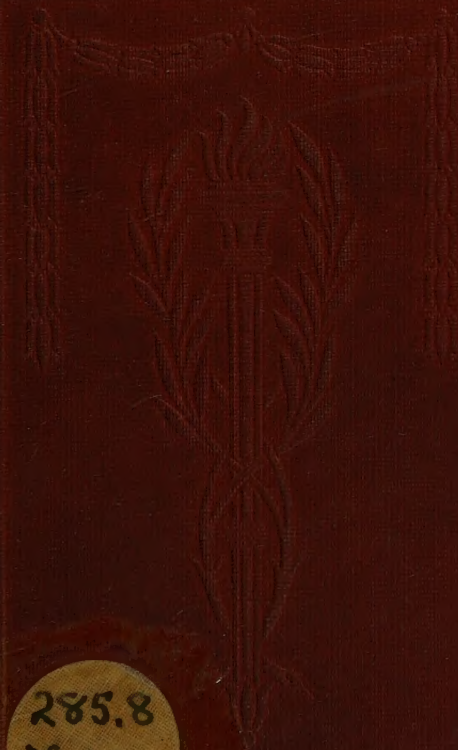


CONGREGATIONALISM

BENJAMIN A. MILLARD



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X

CONGREGATIONALISM

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

“Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

Congregationalism

BY
BENJAMIN A. MILLARD

THE
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SOCIETY
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PREFACE

THE scope of this little book on "Congregationalism" has been, necessarily, limited by the purpose of the series to which it belongs. It does not pretend to be a history of Congregationalism, and the writer makes no claim to originality of treatment; there has been no attempt to consult original documents. The publishers, in this series on "Varieties of the Christian Faith," aim at presenting a brief account of each particular "variety" in such a form as shall appeal to the general reader who desires to inform himself of the main principles and historical setting, of the origin and development of the various sections into which the Christian Church is at present divided, with some indication of the place which each fills in modern life, its achievements in the past, and its outlook for the future. It is not intended to be a plea for Congregationalism, though the writer hopes that his statement of the

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principles will both commend them to readers who have not previously been acquainted with them, and confirm in them those who are already connected with the Churches embodying them.

There are many obvious, though inevitable, omissions. Questions of policy and administration, which are of urgent and practical importance to Congregationalists, have, with the exception of a bare reference here and there, been ignored, as the general reader will hardly be in a position to appreciate the points involved in their discussion.

Strictly speaking, any account of "Congregationalism" ought to include the Baptists, since, as is pointed out in the text (Chapter IV), in their conception of the nature of a Church and in their general polity they are "Congregationalist"; the one point of division being the New Testament meaning of baptism. But the Baptists have a history, and a very noble one, of their own; a history which has been so dominated by the one distinctive principle of "Believers' Baptism" for which they stand, that in the opinion of

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the writer, full justice could not have been done to them in a general account of Congregationalism. It is to be hoped that the present series may include a volume devoted to the Baptists.

Hardly any reference has been made in the following pages to Congregational settlements on the continent of Europe, or to the Congregationalism of America. Any adequate treatment in this direction would have been impossible in the space at the writer's disposal; and, after all, Congregational principles are the same all the world over. England may be regarded as the home of post-Reformation Congregationalism, and in the process of its emergence in English religious life of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and its subsequent development, the characteristics of the movement, both in principles and in polity, may be most appropriately studied.

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CHAPTER I

ORIGINS

CONGREGATIONALISM dates its history from the beginning of the Christian Church. The first Christian Societies, it is contended, were all Congregational Churches, and the Church of Christ on earth was the fellowship of these separate Congregational Churches held together in an ideal spiritual unity.

Congregationalism founds itself, both as regards its governing principles and the forms of its polity, on the New Testament. It justifies its existence on the ground that in both its principles and its polity there are most truly and most appropriately expressed the underlying, essential truths of the Gospel of Jesus as it was preached by the Apostles and believed by the earliest disciples. While claiming to

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be the perpetuation of Primitive Christianity in modern times, it makes its appeal to the modern world, not merely on the ground of its primitiveness, but as being, to-day, the truest and most appropriate expression of the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The term "Congregationalism" suggests, primarily, a particular form of Church polity; but, actually, it implies certain spiritual ideas of which the polity is only the convenient embodiment. It is these ideas which matter most for Congregationalists, and give to the Congregational polity its distinctive forms.

The sources for Congregationalism, its authoritative documents, are the writings of the New Testament; an examination of those writings will reveal the grounds on which it justifies both its principles and its polity.

In the days immediately following the final withdrawal of the visible presence of Jesus from His disciples, the first chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles shows us the Apostles, with some other of the disciples of the Lord, meeting together

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for prayer : informal gatherings, no doubt, with which they occupied the time till "the promise of the Father" should be given. But one of these meetings assumes a much more formal character with a specific purpose in view. The brethren are assembled together in their corporate capacity, for the deliberate purpose of transacting a business which was felt to be essential to the effective carrying on of the work which their Master had committed to them, the election of one of their number, to take the place of Judas, as a witness of his resurrection.

It is impossible to imagine that so definite and important a matter would have been undertaken at a casual meeting of the brethren. We may take for granted that the community of the disciples would be apprised beforehand of the business, and that all the available brethren would be present.

This surely is the first account of a meeting of the Church of Christ. But even though it be held that the Church was not formally constituted until the day of Pentecost, there are certain obvious

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features about this meeting which are significant. Everyone present is a disciple of the Lord, occupying a definite personal relation to Him. That relationship gives to each the right to be present, and is the common bond which unites them. There is evidently the consciousness of the guidance of the brethren by the inspiring and penetrating spirit of their unseen Master. Just as He had in past days chosen the "twelve," so now the choice of a successor to the apostate is to be His choice, made through them as His instruments. Though one of their number acts as leader of the assembly the election is the act of the whole company, as the medium through which the will of Christ is expressed. The appointment is His appointment ; His authority is their *congé d'élire*.

As the stream of Church history broadens out, it is these significant features which re-appear in the societies of believers which are described as "Churches." The basis of their fellowship is the personal relation of each individual to the living Christ ; He has "called" and sanctified them ; He is the power of God for their

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salvation ; in each there is the conscious presence of the spirit of Christ, they live because He lives in them. In that personal relation, realized by each individual, lies the link which unites them into a society. Whatever validity, authority, and power are to be found in the Church spring out of the fact that He is in them, and acts through every individual of the society. The order of the evolution of the Church's being is, first the disciple, then the Church. It is this ultimate fact of the vital union of the disciple with his Lord, and the personal relation of love and loyalty to Him, upon which the society of the Church is based. It was around this spiritual principle that the Churches of the first century came into being and realized such wonderful power and increase.

And this basal principle of Church fellowship, the voluntary association of Christ-redeemed and Christ-filled men and women, is not in any way weakened when we come to consider the relation of the local and separate Churches to the Church of Christ throughout the world. In the New Testament the Catholic idea is vague,

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elusive, and wholly spiritual. The relation of the part to the whole and the whole in the part is a purely spiritual one, the sufficiency and spiritual independence of the separate Churches is unquestionable. Just as it is first the disciple and then the Church, so it is first the gathered Church of the disciples then the Church universal. It is the Churches that constitute the Church, and not the Church that legitimizes the Churches.

Such evidence as there may be in the first century of the rise of the conception of the Catholic Church is, as we see it emerging, still dominated by the fundamental idea of the personal relation of the individual disciple to the risen and living Lord. Jesus in, and working through, the disciple: upon this foundation the life of the Church, local and Catholic, is built, and in harmony with it the organization of the Church is developed. If the factor of the Christ-redeemed and Christ-filled individual be eliminated the entire life and function of the Church of the first century falls to pieces. It is this, and only this, that justifies everything else.

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From the end of the first century other ideas begin to find their way into the theory of the Church. In the process of time these elements, first obscure and then obliterate, the basal conception of the disciple as the germinal unit of the Church. Developments in organization appear which embody this departure from the primary idea, and encourage a still further departure until the primary idea is submerged altogether.

But whatever happened from the beginning of the second century, it seems impossible, on a plain reading of the documents, to escape the following conclusions respecting the Church of the New Testament :—

(a) Discipleship consisted in faith in, and obedience to, Jesus Christ; in that faith the process of salvation was set up, the redeeming energy of Christ was generated within the soul of the disciple; and in that obedience there was realized the divine possibilities of manhood. This relationship of faith and love, of loyalty and communion, was entirely a personal affair between the disciple and the Lord, it could not be created or controlled by any third party.

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(b) This discipleship was the basis of Church membership. The existence of the Church was founded on the reality of the oneness of the disciple with Christ. The Church was the society of men and women, in any place and however limited in number, who had been called by Jesus Christ and sanctified by Him.

(c) The authority of the Church, the validity of its judgments, the effectiveness of its activities, lay in the fact that the members were Christ-possessed men and women ; because, and in so far as, Christ was in the disciple, therefore, and so far, was He in the Church, and the Church became the channel of the manifestation of His presence and power.

(d) Wherever even "two or three" were gathered together in His name there was a gathered Church, with all the spiritual functions of "the communion of the saints in Christ." In the fellowship of these "gathered Churches" of Christ in every place with each other, there grew up the one Church of Christ throughout the world. "What was in the whole was in the part, and what was in the part was in the whole."

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(e) These local Churches were all independent of one another, as far as their internal organization and authority and the administration of their affairs were concerned ; each Church was spiritually sufficient and self-contained. Since the life of the Church was the life of Christ acting through the Christ-possessed and Christ-dominated disciples, no higher authorization for its functions and activities was required. Everything depended for its validity on the reality of the union between the disciple and the Lord. But though spiritually independent of each other they were one in love and the spirit of Christ, and failed not to encourage and exhort and advise each other, growing up into one living spiritual fellowship in Christ.

These are the features which may be discerned in the Church and the Churches of the New Testament. Behind them all there is the primary conception of the disciple as the Christ-redeemed and Christ-possessed soul, and the Church as the voluntary communion and fellowship of such. These conceptions are as simple as they are spiritual ; and it is these primary

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spiritual conceptions which find their embodiment in that section of the Church Universal which is known to-day as "Congregationalism."

It may be urged that these conceptions of discipleship and of the Church were never more than ideally true. Actually, we know that in some Churches, and probably in all at some time or another, there were disciples in name only; men and women in fellowship with the Church who were not themselves redeemed by Jesus Christ, nor in spiritual union with Him, nor obeyed Him; and the life of the Church was, to that extent, vitiated. This has to be acknowledged. In so early a period of the Church's history as that covered by the New Testament record we read of "false brethren," "grievous wolves," coming in. But this does not invalidate the ideal of the New Testament Church. Actually, it may never have been realized in its perfection and completeness, yet it was the governing ideal, and determined both the aims and organization of the Churches. They were themselves conscious of the disparity between the ideal

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and the actual, but they were earnest and vigilant to guard the ideal as securely, and to approach it as nearly, as they were able. It remains true that, imperfectly as it may have been realized at various times and places, its inspiration and impulse carried the Church of the New Testament to a spiritual purity, and to noble achievements which have not, in any subsequent age, been surpassed.

When we turn to the organization of the New Testament Church and the forms of its polity, we find more difficulty in tracing the lines of their development than in discerning the principles upon which the Church was founded. While the latter are clear and unmistakable, the former are variable, indistinct, and evidently adapted to local conditions and peculiarities of temperament. This, in itself, suggests that, while the principles upon which the Church was founded were essential to its life, the forms of its polity were more accidental and casual in their nature. We cannot find in the New Testament any one absolutely rigid and

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invariable form, still less is there any indication that uniformity in the organization of the Church was regarded as necessary either to its existence or its unity. It was necessary that the varying forms should adequately express the fundamental facts of discipleship and Church fellowship; but when that requirement is met, what we find is not uniformity, but approximation to a general type. Whatever shades of difference can be discovered in the polity of the New Testament Churches, there is not one of them that involves anything out of harmony with the principles enumerated above: the personal relation of the disciple to the Lord, the Church as the fellowship of Christ-redeemed and Christ-possessed men and women, the spiritual independence of the separate societies, the validity of the functions and activities of the separate Churches as derived from the spirit of Christ acting through the Christ-possessed disciples. So long as the polity conserved these principles, the forms upon which it was organized were indifferent.

There must have been some attempt at

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organization, even from the first. It is difficult to believe that the office of the "seven" men elected to "serve tables" represents the only movement towards organization of the rapidly growing Church at Jerusalem. A loose congeries of individuals held together by no external bond would never have accomplished, either at Jerusalem or elsewhere, the results that were achieved in the first decade of the Church's history. As the lines of a definite polity begin to appear, especially in the epistolary literature, they are characterized by the notes of simplicity and spiritual directness. It is possible that the model of the Jewish synagogue was, to some limited extent, followed. Generally speaking, there were two orders of ministry, and only two, in the earliest societies: Presbyters and Deacons. The former were concerned especially with the spiritual side of the Church life, and the latter with the administration of its affairs. The Presbyters, as the name implies, would be chosen, as a rule, from the older members of the Church who were also distinguished for their piety and Christian character;

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the Deacons, both for their piety and their business capacity. The officers of the Church were elected by the suffrages of the whole body, and they acted as the representatives of the Church. There was no divine right attaching to office, save as that right was conferred by the spirit of Christ conveyed through the suffrages of the Church.

In addition to the two-fold ministry of Presbyters and Deacons, there are vague and undefined references in the New Testament to other ministries. We read of "powers," "gifts of healing," "helps," "governments," "kinds of tongues"; some of these terms may cover subsidiary functions of the regular ministry, others doubtless refer to functions associated with the "charismatic" manifestations. But as these mysterious gifts of the Spirit faded out of the life of the early Church the ministry associated with them disappeared, or was merged in the outstanding ministry of Presbyters and Deacons. Further, there was at the first, concurrent with the local and permanent ministry, another and wider, but temporary, ministry

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applicable to the Church as a whole, and specially incident to the apostolic period and activity. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, these exercised a roving commission, their permanent attachment to any one local Church was discouraged. As the organization of the Churches assumed a more definite and settled form, this higher apostolic ministry disappeared; its purpose, peculiar to the early days, being accomplished.

Towards the close of the first century a third order of ministry begins to emerge, the order of Bishops. By the middle of the second century it had become generally, if not universally, established. There is no place in this little volume for a discussion of the fascinating problem of the rise and supremacy of the episcopate. A few of the facts, upon which there is general agreement, may, however, be noticed, since they bear upon the Congregational attitude toward episcopacy.

At the close of the apostolic period the "traces of the third and highest order . . . are few and indistinct."¹ The opinion

¹ Lightfoot, "Dissertations on the Apostolic Age," p. 153.

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“that the same officers in the Church who were first called apostles came afterward to be designated bishops, is baseless.”¹ “The Episcopate was formed, not out of the apostolic order by localization, but out of the presbyteral by elevation.”² The circumstances of the establishment of episcopal government are “shrouded in darkness.”³ “In the apostolic writings the two (Bishop and Presbyter) are only different designations of one and the same office.”⁴ “At Philippi, in Asia Minor, in Crete, the Presbyter is so called” (Bishop).⁵ It is in the Church at Jerusalem that we find the first instance of the new development : “James, the Lord’s brother, alone within the period compassed by the apostolic writings, can claim to be regarded as a Bishop in the later and more special sense of the term.”⁶ Though even in the case of James, he holds his office, not in isolation from, but as a member of, the presbyterial college, of which he was the head.⁷ “The New Testament presents

¹ Lightfoot, “Dissertations, etc.,” 153-4. ² *Id.* : 155.

³ *Id.* : 160. ⁴ *Id.* : 151. ⁵ *Id.* : 151. ⁶ *Id.* : 155.

⁷ *cf. Id.* : 156.

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no distinct traces of such organization in the Gentile congregations . . . the third stage, in which episcopacy definitely appears, still lies beyond the horizon."¹

Though the actual stages in the process of development, by which the episcopal office came into being, and its general adoption as a settled order in the ministry of the Church was secured, are "shrouded in darkness," it is not difficult to conceive of the manner of its becoming. We are not going beyond experience and common sense, if we suppose that the college of Presbyters required that one of their number should preside at their meetings and at the meetings of the Church; also, that to the presiding Presbyter should fall, quite naturally, certain functions in which one must act for many and as their representative. "The existence of a council or college necessarily supposes a presidency of some kind, whether this presidency be assumed by each member in turn, or lodged in the hands of a single person."² Whether, at the first, the office of President was shared by each member in turn, or fixed

¹ *Id.*: 156-7. ² *Id.*: 167.

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in one person by election, it can readily be imagined that in the stress of circumstances by which the Church was surrounded the tendency was for the presidency to be settled in the person of the strongest and most capable member of the presbyterial college.

In so far as he can be found at all in the New Testament, we recognize in the President of the Presbyters the third officer of the Christian ministry, and we find his modern successor in the pastor of a Congregational Church. He is one among brethren, he is the presiding officer of the Church, he is the head of the spiritual directorate of the Church and of its administrative business. He is elected to his office by the free suffrages of the Church, and in his election the Church supposes itself to be guided by the spirit of Christ operating through the members. His office is only valid as he is the representative of the community over which he presides ; he receives his office from Christ alone, though the Church in calling him to the office of pastor expresses the divine election. Every word of this description

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applies equally to the bishop of the first century and to the "Pastor" of Congregationalism in the twentieth.

Congregationalism has no quarrel with Episcopacy as it existed in its germinal form, in its New Testament fore-shadowing; basing itself on the New Testament, it adopts the pastoral office as implied in the New Testament polity. It is the later developments of the episcopal idea which Congregationalism repudiates; those developments were rapid and radical in their scope. The power of the Bishop quickly increased, the distance between himself and his colleagues of the Presbytery grew with leaps and bounds. When the office was established and recognized as a separate order of the ministry many new ideas crystallized around it. It encroached upon the rights of the Church as a body, it ceased to be a representative office and became a monarchical government, acting solely in its own right. It was by a resolute process of usurpation that the Bishop of Apostolic times became the Bishop of Cyprian; and in every stage of the process there was violated one or other of the

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primary spiritual principles upon which the Church had been founded.

Ignatius, who stands at the turn of the first century into the second, asserts the claims of the Bishop in language which even a modern episcopalian has not hesitated to describe as "forcible to the verge of blasphemy."¹ "His language is strained to the utmost."² "It need hardly be remarked how subversive of the true spirit of Christianity, in the negation of individual freedom and the consequent suppression of direct responsibility to God in Christ, is the crushing despotism with which this language (of Ignatius), if taken literally, would invest the episcopal office."³ There can be little doubt that Ignatius meant it to be taken literally, and that his successors so took it. But even in Ignatius there is some lingering shadow of a representative character in the episcopal office, it is still in some measure through the commonalty of the Church that Christ authorizes the Bishop. The crown is put upon the episcopal usurpation by Cyprian, who regards the

¹ Gwatkin, "The Early Church," Vol. i., p. 293.

² Lightfoot, "Dissertations, etc.," p. 200. ³ *Id.*: 201-2.

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Bishop as "the absolute vicegerent of Christ in things spiritual."¹ Cyprian focussed the floating sacerdotalism of his day into a definite and astounding system, of which the Bishop is the necessary head. "The Bishop is the indispensable channel of divine grace, the indispensable bond of Christian brotherhood. The Episcopate is not so much the roof as the foundation-stone of the ecclesiastical edifice: not so much the legitimate development as the primary condition of a Church."²

In defence of this vitiated line of development there are often urged the necessities and dangers of the time, the scattering of the apostolate and the Jerusalem Church in the fall of the city, the death of those who had been in close association with the Lord in the days of His flesh, the incoming floods of heresy which threatened to swamp the ship of the Church with its precious treasure of the evangelical tradition and Gospel truth. While making full allowance for these trying circumstances, it may be asserted that if the ship of the Church was saved from the floods

¹ *Id.*: p. 204. ² *Id.*: p. 208.

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of heresy, it was, none the less, waterlogged by the incoming of elements which were as fatal to its mission and its power, as even the heresies might have been. The Congregational view of the developments of the second, third, and fourth centuries is, that, however grave the dangers, they would have been more effectually met by conserving instead of sacrificing the spiritual principles upon which the Church was founded by the Apostles, by a closer fellowship with Jesus Christ, by a fuller trust in the Lord of the Church than in the Bishop of the Church.

It is idle to speculate upon the possible course of history if things had been different, if the dangers of the time had been met by a more evangelical line of defence. The fact remains that the Congregationalism of the New Testament Church was submerged beneath the triumph of a monarchical and sacerdotal episcopacy.

This triumph was not unchallenged by those who perceived its dangers. Such movements as that of Montanism, with all its fantastic fanaticism, were a protest against the usurpations of the Episcopate,

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and a plea for a return to the more spiritual conceptions of the New Testament.

The protest failed, and the Church condemned itself to more than a thousand years of banishment from the throne-room of her Redeemer and that vital and personal communion between the disciple and the Saviour which is essential to the Gospel of Jesus. In the centuries of her exile, now and again, her more daring sons and daughters pushed past the intercepting crowd of Priests and Bishops, of Patriarchs and Popes, and asserted their right to unfettered fellowship with their Master and Saviour. It was along the lines of communication set up by these brave souls that the vital power of the Gospel reached and fructified the life of the Church. Through centuries of darkness and exile the sacred watchwords of the Gospel were passed on from heart to heart, until, under the impulse and inspiration of the Reformation, the New Testament ideal of a Congregational Church re-appeared in the mind and heart of the Church, and completed the emancipation of the soul from the tyranny of sacerdotal Episcopacy.

CHAPTER II

RESURRECTION

ON its official side the Reformation in England was, at the outset, a very doubtful business. It was political in its origin ; if so dignified a description can be given to the motives of a lascivious king. Henry VIII cared no more for the principles of the Reformation than he cared for purity and faithfulness in the marriage relation. In so far as he had any religious sentiments at all, they were more in sympathy with the Catholic faith than with the ideals of the Reformers. The superstitions of sixteenth-century Romanism were more to the mind of the English King than the pure spiritual ideals of Luther, Calvin, and the rest. "With the Protestants Henry had no sympathy whatever."¹ In his breach with Rome, he altered the character of the accepted religion as little as possible.

¹ J. R. Green, "History of the English People," Vol. iii., p. 345.

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With the nationalization of the English Church and himself as the master of it, the settled policy of Henry was to resist, as far as he was able, the invasion of his Church by the reforming zeal of the continental Protestants.

But, happily, there were other forces at work in the situation than the conservatism of the King. A section of the episcopal Bench had strong leanings toward the Reformation movement, though, in view of the King's attitude, they could only act with the utmost caution and hesitation. And behind the King, and behind the Bishops, there lay the eager longings for spiritual emancipation of a considerable part of the nation. The leaven of new spiritual ideas had been working freely among the mass of the people. Amongst those who really cared, a feeling of utter weariness with the old order, and a desire for something more vital and more real, had openly manifested itself. Men were looking this way and that for deliverance from the tyranny of Priest and Pope. The children of the Church were hungry and were not fed; they asked for bread,

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the bread of life, and Mother Church gave them stones, the stones of a barren ritual, a soulless formalism, a remorseless despotism. Quite apart from the Statecraft of Henry, the tides of the Reformation could not for long have been dammed back from the national life of England.

For more than four hundred years before Henry took up his campaign against the Pope, the seeds of "heresy" had been sown in the soil of English religious life. Emissaries of the heretical movements on the continent of Europe found their way to England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. So early as the reign of Henry III, we read of attempts to suppress the "meetings and conventicles" maintained by "certain vagrant persons." In the fourteenth century the Lollards lit the candle of reform, and though the movement was crushed, its effect remained as leaven in the life of the nation. Above all, Wycliff's priceless gift to the nation of the Scriptures in the common tongue, contributed an irresistible impulse toward the national repudiation of Romanism in the

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sixteenth century, and made the triumph of the Reformation in England inevitable.

For a hundred years before the exigencies of Henry VIII's matrimonial escapades led him to break with the Pope, there were, up and down the country, "secret assemblies" of earnest Christian men and women who sought to realize, apart from the Roman religion, "some of the deepest and strongest cravings of their spiritual nature for the enlargement of their knowledge of God, the discipline of their strength, and the perfecting of their faith and joy."¹ Though "it is not contended that these secret assemblies . . . were regularly organized Congregational Churches, or that their members held the Congregational theory of Church polity . . . they had discovered that where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, though not in consecrated walls and without a priest, Christ Himself is among them; and it was their experience of the peace and blessedness which His presence in their assemblies imparted to them that drew them together at the peril of life

¹ Dale, "History of English Congregationalism," p. 59.

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itself. They had discovered that devout men on whom the Bishops had conferred no mysterious powers could instruct their brethren in Christian faith and duty, and lift up the hearts of an assembly to God in prayer. Their teachers were men in whom they themselves had recognized the light and power of the Spirit of God. The only justification of their secret meetings, and the only explanation of the spiritual benefit they derived from them, was to be found in the principles of Congregationalism.”¹

The idea of religious toleration (to say nothing of religious liberty) had not, in Tudor days, dawned upon the consciousness of Kings and Princes and Governors. Henry harried, alike, Catholics who questioned his ecclesiastical supremacy and Protestants who would have him use his supremacy to establish the Reformed Faith in England. When Edward VI succeeded his father and power fell into the hands of those who favoured the Protestant movement, so vehemently were the new religious ideas forced upon the nation that the re-

¹ Dale, “Hist. of English Congregationalism,” pp. 59-60.

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action, under Mary, became inevitable. In the experiences of the lurid years of the Catholic reaction, the nation was reminded how sharp and cruel were the teeth and claws of Rome, and the lesson was not lost. Protestantism was driven underground, but it was not destroyed. "If the Protestants had not known how to govern, indeed, they knew how to die: and the cause which prosperity had ruined revived in the dark hour of persecution."¹ "Every death at the stake won hundreds to the cause for which the victims died."²

During Mary's reign the number of secret assemblies largely increased. The spiritual impulses which had called these secret congregations into being were re-enforced, and the necessity for them made more apparent, by the merciless attitude of the Roman Church toward all who sought the satisfaction of their spiritual needs by means other than those which she had prescribed.

The policy of religious persecution is, in every case, fatuous. The surest ally

¹ J. R. Green, "History of the English People," Vol. iv., p. 92.

² *Id.*: Vol. iv., p. 97.

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of the "heretic" is the persecutor. Catholic Mary rendered the Protestant cause conspicuous service in every fire she lit. When she came to the throne she found England divided against itself; the fortunes of Protestantism were trembling in the balance, its main strength lay among the lower and less powerful orders of the people. Its leaders had been hopelessly discredited by their political blundering. In the brief interlude of Edward VI the violent methods of the Reformers had ruined a golden opportunity. When the Catholic Queen died, she had stamped indelibly upon the English mind that conception of Roman Catholicism as a cruel and horrible despotism, void of moral sense and human feeling, which still, to a very large extent, persists with the average Englishman. She had made a continuance of the Roman allegiance impossible. In the brief period of her five years' reign she had lost England for Rome, and lost it for ever. And, from our point of view, not only had she made Protestantism inevitable, but she had forced pious and spiritually eager souls into that line of

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revolt against the whole sacerdotal system of religion which drove them back to the spiritual principles of the New Testament Church and its Congregational polity.

With the accession of Elizabeth a new England sprang into being. Old things had passed away, all things had become new. Radiant possibilities opened out before the nation. It is true they were as yet only possibilities, but the fact that changed everything was that the forces for the realization of those possibilities had arrived, and began rapidly to develop in their scope and intensity. Elizabeth and her counsellors are to modern England what Arthur and his round table of knights were to the England of the middle ages. The great Queen lives in an atmosphere of legend and poetic romance, which not even modern historical criticism has been able to dissipate. Behind all her Tudor arrogance, her vanity, her petulance, her tortuous policy, there lay a genuine love for England, an intense spirit of nationalism, a settled determination to make England great, and in the grateful judgment

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of succeeding generations these elements in her character cover a multitude of her sins.

Congregationalists have small cause to love her ecclesiastical policy. She harried them without mercy. She hated their principles. Her ideals of government in State and Church were diametrically opposed to the ideals they cherished. She herself was never heartily in sympathy with the Protestant point of view. Puritanism, in which the English Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries found its consistent expression, she detested. But along with all this, we recognize that Elizabeth resolutely determined that the characteristic genius of the English people should have room to develop along its own lines. She created and maintained the conditions in which it became possible for Congregationalism to fight its way to the realization of its ideals. And though in the fight she was one of its bitterest and most uncompromising foes, no one more than herself contributed to the conditions of national development in which Congregationalism

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takes its place as one of the permanent factors of modern England.

The rapturous joy with which the accession of Elizabeth was hailed, by the nation generally and by the Protestants in particular, very quickly gave place to surprise and suspicion at the hesitation with which she followed the Protestant line of policy. The Queen had no idea of committing herself to a root and branch policy against Catholicism, still less did she propose to countenance religious liberty or to tolerate the free exercise of individual judgment in spiritual matters. The majority of the nation was still Catholic in feeling, though it had had enough of the English variant of the Spanish *auto-da-fé*, and was not satisfied to have its nationalism dragged at the skirts of the Pope of Rome. The English Catholics may have tired somewhat of Papalism, but they were still Catholics. Elizabeth recognized that, even had she wished, she was not strong enough to challenge, with an overt declaration of war, the Catholic sentiment of the most powerful section of her people.

Permission for the Gospel and Epistle

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for the day, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed to be read in English, was the meagre concession to Protestantism which she made in the opening months of her reign, and this was accompanied with the prohibition of preaching and all public appeals to popular feeling. With the opening of Parliament the attitude of both the Crown and the Parliament towards religion revealed itself. A number of Acts relating to religion were passed, the two most important being (1) "An Act to restore to the Crown the ancient jurisdiction over the Estate Ecclesiastical and Spiritual, and abolishing all foreign powers repugnant to the same"; (2) "An Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church and Administration of the Sacraments."

These Acts, of Supremacy and Uniformity, express the governing ideas which dominated the religious policy of Elizabeth throughout her long reign. Entrenched within their bulwarks she fought strenuously, and with all the vehemence of her Tudor temper, against any and every opinion which travelled beyond them. The

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Crown was the sole authority in matters of religion, there was no room for individual judgment. The Church had to take her laws and doctrines, her ritual and sacraments, her discipline and policy, absolutely, from the Sovereign. In matters of religion, even more than in matters of State, the will of the Monarch was supreme. The Bishops had no power over doctrines and ceremonies, save as it was delegated to them by the civil authority, and the private member of the Church was the merest cipher. The Church was simply a branch of the civil government, and possessed not even the shadow of self-government. The Pope of Rome had for long usurped the throne of Christ in the Church ; under the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity the Queen took the place of the Pope, but Christ was still dethroned. Though Elizabeth, perhaps with a keener sense of humour than her father, preferred to call herself the supreme "*Governor*" of the Church, yet she meant the same thing as Henry. When the Queen laid down the doctrines and the forms of worship for the Church, no variation was

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to be tolerated. To follow any other form than that prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer was a penal offence. There was a splendid impartiality in the application of the Acts. "For a Catholic priest to celebrate Mass was a crime : for a Catholic layman to be present at the celebration of Mass was a crime For an Anabaptist minister to baptize an adult by immersion was a crime : to submit to such baptism was a crime. For a Presbyterian minister to baptize a child, administer the Lord's Supper, or conduct Public Worship after the custom of the Church of Geneva, was a crime ; and it was a crime to be present at any of these illegal services."¹ "When they met to confess their sins to Almighty God and to implore His mercy, the only words they were allowed to use were the words provided for them by the Queen and the Parliament. The Queen and the Parliament also determined what prayers and thanksgiving they should offer when they baptized their children and met at the Table of the Lord. It was not enough

¹ Dale, "History of English Congregationalism," pp. 69-70.

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that the Queen's clergy when celebrating worship in the Queen's Churches should use the Queen's prayers ; no other prayers could legally be offered by any Congregation of Englishmen."¹ And the Act went still further. It was not allowed to tender consciences to abstain from participation in the recognized services. Every one must go to Church and participate whether they liked it or not, to absent oneself was to incur the penalty of the law. One was under a legal compulsion to participate in the Queen's religion, just as one was under compulsion to pay the Queen's taxes.

The Acts, especially that of Uniformity, were not carried through Parliament without protest and opposition. Congregationalism had not formed itself definitely enough in the minds of those who were travelling in that direction to utter a formal protest. On the Protestant side there was, as yet, no sense of shock at the idea of the control of religion by the civil arm. In many countries on the Continent the Princes had been the main protectors of the Reformation, and in

¹ *Id.* p. 70.

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return it seemed but natural to allow some latitude of control to be exercised by its protectors. The control of the national Religion by the national Prince, seemed a welcome relief from the control of the national Religion by a foreign Priest. The circumstances under which it was able to maintain its struggle against the Roman power made an Erastian tendency fatally easy. In England Protestantism founded its hope upon the Queen, and under the circumstances it seemed to the great majority of Protestants not unreasonable that the Queen should control the movement.

The main opposition came from the Catholics. The Book of Common Prayer, which was attached to the Act of Uniformity, unmistakably clashed with Romish doctrine and practice. The book, according to the Bishop of Chester who spoke against the Bill, provided no true consecration of the bread and the wine in the sacrament, and banished the Real Presence from the sacramental elements: the central act in the Catholic office was thus debased, and virtually repudiated.

But apart from the doctrinal position

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of the book, the Catholic Bishops deeply resented the assumption by the Crown and Parliament of functions which, according to the whole Catholic theory of the Church, belonged exclusively to the episcopal office. The Congregationalist of to-day, though he will have nothing to do with the conception of the episcopal function upon which the Bishop of Chester formulated his protest, is heartily in agreement with him in his rejection of the claim of the Crown to legislate for the Church in matters of doctrine and practice. The Congregationalist is as high a Churchman as the Romanist in his insistence on the inalienable right of the Church to control her own affairs under Christ. Indeed, he is a higher Churchman than the Romanist since he asserts for the Church the right to legislate for herself, and will not consent to hand the control of her affairs over to an oligarchy of Bishops, and ultimately to the Autocrat of Rome.

If the Act of Uniformity had been rigidly enforced against the Catholics in the early years of the reign, the settlement of the nation under Elizabeth might have

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been seriously imperilled. The Government was compelled to act cautiously and to drive with a loose rein. The passing of the Act resulted in the deprivation of only about two hundred of the clergy, including the entire Bench of Bishops save one (Llandaff). The Act was applied with great forbearance toward the Catholics, at any rate, for thirteen years. Many of the Romish clergy retained their livings in the hope of better times. In some parts of the country the Mass continued to be celebrated by the Parish Priests. This interval of comparative peace was sufficient to consolidate the national sentiment of the moderate party, and gave opportunity for strengthening the hold of the Queen upon the affections of her people.

In 1571, the Pope was ill-advised enough to excommunicate the Queen, and at once the whole position in England was changed. The nation was incensed at the insult. The act was a direct incentive to conspiracy at home and to hostile combinations on the Continent. The challenge was taken up, and produced a tightening of

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the administration of the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity. Subscription to those of the XXXIX Articles which condemned Romish doctrine and practice was enforced, the laws against the Catholics were increased, and the Queen, against her own inclination, was driven to make some concessions to the puritan section of the Church. The only result of the Pope's action was to strengthen the position of the more pronounced Reformation influence in the Established Church.

By one of the curious humours of history, Elizabeth stands as the bulwark of Protestantism in England at the moment of its greatest need, when it was struggling to maintain itself against the frantic efforts of Rome to smash the whole movement. Perhaps the net result of her policy was in that direction. But the strange thing about the position was that the Queen herself was, in some respects, more Romish (or at least Catholic) than Protestant in feeling. She bitterly resented the puritan tendency which, from the beginning of her reign, began to assert itself in the Church of England, and

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struggled hard, if not for dominance in the Church, at any rate, for a full recognition of its legitimacy. Except in the matter of her supremacy, one has the impression that the Queen persecuted the Protestants with greater zest and satisfaction than she persecuted the Catholics. In her attitude to the puritan movement she was probably guided by a true instinct, for within the circle of puritan ideas there lay, logically implicit, the denial of her entire ecclesiastical system. The keystone of her policy was the absolute control of religion by the Crown; a man's conscience was to be held in the keeping of the State. The Romish claim to authority in matters of religion was boldly transferred from the Church to the Crown, and was urged with as much rigour. The fundamental conceptions of Puritanism could not, anyway, be reconciled with such a claim.

The Puritan movement had its source in the re-emergence, after a thousand years of submergence, of those principles of the personal relation of the individual to God and the disciple to Christ which form the

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very soul of New Testament religion. On the spiritual side it stood for the assertion of that personal relation with all the rights and privileges, and with all the responsibilities attached to it. On the political side it involved the repudiation of the theory of absolutism, which had been so carefully and so persistently built into the fabric of the State by the Tudor sovereigns. If Roman Catholicism was the great enemy of English liberties on the side of religion, Elizabeth and the Tudor tradition no less was the foe on the political side of popular liberties. In Puritanism lay those spiritual ideas which, in the sphere of religion, shattered the tyranny of Rome and of Tudor absolutism as well ; and in the political sphere made modern political freedom possible. Elizabeth, in her conflict with Rome, was guided and inspired by loyalty to England and the instinct of nationalism. In her conflict with Puritanism she was guided and inspired by those ideas of personal absolutism which were bred into her very nature. Her resistance to Rome, her loyalty to England give us the standard

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by which we measure her success; her loyalty to the theory of absolute government handed down to her from her predecessors is the standard by which we measure her failure; for in this respect, that she did fail is incontestable, and every plank in the platform of modern political liberty is the witness of her failure.

“The fundamental idea of Puritanism in all its manifestations was the supreme authority of Scripture brought to bear upon the conscience, as opposed to an unenlightened reliance on the priesthood and the outward ordinances of the Church. The puritan . . . seemed, to himself at least, to be aiming, not at singularity, but at obedience to that higher spiritual order prevailing in the Universe, which he recognized as being the expression of the mind of God, and therefore of more commanding authority than the mere arrangements and requirements of man.”¹ In this principle we have the promise and potency of all spiritual and political liberty which has been won from absolutism either in Church or State, and the impulse of the

¹ Browne, “The English Puritans,” p. 3.

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movement which in the reign of Elizabeth was to take its place in the Church as "Congregationalism."

In its earlier stages Puritanism was a movement within the national Church: those who were recognized as its leaders had no thought of separation from the fellowship of the established religion. They were intent on reform; to have thought of separation would have seemed like the acknowledgment of failure. Even in the curious attempt to graft the Presbyterian form of Church government upon the episcopal and run the two concurrently, the ideal of nationalism in religion was still dominant. The campaign against the Romish vestments, and what remained of Romish doctrine in the English Prayer Book, moved in a region of thought in which separatism had no place. The patience of the Puritan leaders, the persistence with which they urged reform in face of resolute persecution, the tenacity with which they clung to the Queen's Church in spite of the irreconcilable attitude of the Queen, are all indicative of the fact that they still cherished the hope of

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puritanizing the Church of England. They had no idea of leaving the Church to the undisputed possession of the Anglo-Catholics. They were obviously playing a waiting game, hoping by the dead weight of their resistance to tire out the resolution of the Queen.

The solidarity of their party was broken, and the success of their tactics imperilled, by the sudden emergence among them of a group of men who boldly developed a doctrine of the Church and a system of polity which were not only far in advance of the position of the main body, but in some respects directly hostile.

On June 19th, 1567, there was discovered, meeting in the Plumbers' Hall, London, a secret congregation of men and women, under the leadership of some of the ministers who had been deprived of their incumbencies for non-compliance with the provisions of the Prayer Book and refusal to wear the prescribed vestments. The more prominent among those captured were imprisoned for twelve months. Though there is considerable uncertainty in the matter, it is probable that after

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their release the Congregation was reformed under the Pastorate of one Richard Fitz, and organized itself as a Congregational Church. This Community of Christian people is generally regarded as the first regularly constituted Congregational Church in England.

But their arrival at the Congregational position was not so much the result of a conscious movement toward a new Church ideal, as an accidental lighting on the principles which had not as yet been specifically formulated. Their Congregationalism was an unexpected discovery made in the wilderness into which they had been driven. We may presume that, at any rate, in the early period of their existence as a separate Church, if Elizabeth had adopted the Puritan ideals for her Church, Richard Fitz and his flock would, for the most part, have rejoined the Establishment. "Since their hopes of a complete reformation had been wrecked, they determined that it would be no crime, but the fulfilment of a duty, for those who wished to cleanse the service of God from the superstitions which still

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defiled it, to assemble together in private houses, and wherever else they could meet safely.”¹ “It seems probable that neither Richard Fitz nor those who were associated with him became Nonconformists for the sake of realizing an ideal form of ecclesiastical polity.”²

Very different was it in the case of Robert Browne, who is generally credited with being the founder of Congregationalism in England, and after whom the Congregationalists were at first known as “Brownists.” Robert Browne, Henry Barrowe, John Greenwood, and John Penry were the apostles of a new conception of the Church and a new formulation of Church polity; or more truly, as they themselves believed, they were the revivers of the spiritual principles upon which the Church had been founded and of the polity of the New Testament.

In the view of these men the Church of England was spiritually impossible. With its subordination to the civil magistrate, its sacerdotal episcopacy, its parish system in which any baptized resident in a parish

¹ Dale, “History of English Congregationalism,” p. 89.

² *Id.*: p. 96.

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is, *ipso facto*, a member of the Church of Christ, its denial of validity as a Church to the "two or three" gathered together in the name of Christ, it violated the principles of which the New Testament Church was the embodiment. No mere Presbyterianizing of the Church, no concession to the Puritan spirit in the matter of vestments simply, could remove this radical conflict with New Testament ideals.

The challenge was thrown down in Browne's pamphlet, "A treatise of Reformation without tarrying for Anie." It is a spirited assault on the position of those who were "tarrying for the Magistrate" to effect the reform of the Church of Christ. The Magistrate has no part or lot in such a business, that is the work of the Church herself, the Church acting under the direct inspiration and guidance of the spirit of Christ.

The first essential for a Christian man is that he should be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he should have entered into the closest personal relation with Christ, that Christ should live in him and he in Christ. Where two or three such Christian people are united together

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in fellowship, the bond being the common relation to Christ, there is a true Church, enjoying all the rights and privileges, fulfilling all the functions, of a Church. The authorization of such communities lay solely in the fact of Christ's presence among them and of His spirit operating through them. Every such gathered Church is spiritually independent of every other, though the separate Churches may profitably meet together in synods "for redress and deciding of matters which cannot well be otherwise taken up." Each Church has, by virtue of the presence of Christ in it, the right to choose its own officers: though the act of choice is not independent of the will of Christ, but is indeed the expression of His will. The Church, that is to say, does not confer on its Pastors and Teachers and Elders such authority as belongs to their office, it merely "discovers to what persons 'the office and message of God' have been entrusted."¹ The officers of the Church are not to exercise their functions independently of the Church, they are not an

¹ Dale, "History of English Congregationalism," p. 128.

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oligarchy ruling the Church in their own right, their rule must be with the consent and concurrence of the whole Church.

In all this we are brought back to the New Testament. It is the glorious resurrection of the Church of the Apostolic period after more than a millennium of submergence. The ideal that had been lost somewhere between the end of the first century and the end of the second, or the middle of the third, is once again discovered, and launched in all its simplicity and spirituality upon a world held in the toils of episcopal usurpation and civil tyranny. It was the re-birth of Congregationalism.

Although in the progress of its history during the past three hundred years, and in countries other than England, on the continent of Europe and especially in America, Congregationalism may in some respects have modified the presentation of its principles and the form of its polity, in everything that is essential it remains, substantially, as its sixteenth-century re-discoverers expounded it, and as the pages of the New Testament reveal it as existing among the Churches of Apostolic days.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT

IT does not belong to the scope of this book to recount at length the history of modern Congregationalism. In the space at the writer's disposal it would be foolish to attempt even a compressed historical statement of its growth and development. It would be but a skeleton, and the interest in skeletons is limited to a very small class.

In the late Dr. R. W. Dale, Congregationalism has its master historian. His great work, "The History of English Congregationalism," edited and brought up to date by his son, Sir A. W. W. Dale, will for some time remain the standard work for those who wish to become acquainted with the history of the movement. A simple reference of my readers to his pages will be a far more useful service than a vain attempt to compress into a few pages the whole story.

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It will, however, be desirable to indicate, briefly, some of the stages through which Congregationalism has passed in its development from its Elizabethan forms to the present position.

Though its fundamental principles are the same to-day as the Elizabethans enunciated then, and the main lines of its polity, as far as it is the expression of those principles, remain the same, there have been, in the three hundred years of its history, certain re-adjustments of its perspective which have involved modifications of its forms. And it should be said that there is nothing in the principles of Congregationalism inconsistent with such modification, either in the past or the future. Congregationalism is a living thing and wherever there is life there must be adjustment to environment. It is highly desirable that Congregationalists should fully recognize this principle, if the Churches of their order are to retain their place and influence in the religious life of the twentieth century. The environment in which we live is vastly different from that of our Congregational fathers of the Elizabethan

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age, and there are likely to be still further changes in the years that lie immediately before us. In face of this it will be fatal if Congregationalism takes up an attitude of wooden immovability. So long as it retains a firm hold upon its root principles, it may fearlessly go forward in its efforts to make its forms effective for its environment. It is in regard to this matter that the main problems of its immediate future lie. It is likely that the "arrested growth," which it at present shares in common with most other branches of the Christian Church, may be due, in part, to a hesitancy in its self-adaptation to the swiftly changing conditions of the opening years of the twentieth century.

When a new principle leaps into the consciousness of a generation, or an old one is re-discovered, it is inevitable that there should be some confusion in its expression in appropriate and adequate forms. There is sure to be some fault in perspective. Undue prominence is given to things that are, after all, accidental; emphasis is laid in the wrong place, the appropriate forms in which its implications

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can be applied to existing conditions have to be sought in experience and experiment.

The principles of Congregationalism as expounded by Robert Browne and the sixteenth-century Congregationalists were in striking agreement with the teaching of the New Testament. So clearly were they perceived, and so plainly stated, that they remain, after three hundred years, sufficient for the Congregationalists of the twentieth century. But when we pass from principles to polity, we are conscious of a crudeness and misplaced emphasis which must not be allowed to prejudice the principles.

Though the pioneers were clear in their enunciation of the idea of the Church as a free, independent, and legitimate association in spiritual fellowship of those who were "in Christ," deriving its validity and its functions from the presence of Christ with the society, their attempts to organize the Church were not, in all cases, equally well considered.

How far was the polity of the New Testament Churches to be regarded as binding upon the Church in all ages : was

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it to be held as final, or as subject to modification? If any discrimination were allowable, what forms were to be retained and what might be discarded? What should be the principles of Church government and discipline? In what relation should the member of a Church stand to the officers, how far was the freedom of the members to be limited by the authority of the officers? In what relation, also, should the separate societies stand to each other? How far did the liberty of the individual extend in the matter of theological doctrine? These and similar questions were answered not always as we answer them now.

1. The Church order of the sixteenth-century Congregationalists had a distinctly aristocratic note, an absolute democratic ideal was not always, not very cordially, encouraged. The tendency was to concentrate the authority of the Church in its "Elders." In some cases it would seem that the administrative function of the Church member ended when he had elected his Elders, who thenceforward became the executive authority, and above the control,

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or even the criticism, of the member. The theory that the Elders represented the Church was carried to the extreme of self-contradiction, the acts of the Elders were held to be the acts of the Church, and the Church ceased to act at all. If this view of Church government had persisted Congregationalism would have disappeared. It abrogated the rights and privileges, dissipated the duties, and destroyed the responsibilities of the individual member. Reaction against this high doctrine of the supremacy of the officers soon manifested itself. It was so contrary to the genius of Congregationalism. Henry Ainsworth, of the exile Church of Amsterdam, and John Robinson, the leader of the Scrooby exiles who settled at Leyden, resisted this aristocratic tendency, and asserted the claim of the Church community for its proper share in the privileges and responsibilities of fellowship. Henry Jacob, who had, after hoping against hope for a reform of the Church of England, thrown in his lot with Robinson's Church at Leyden, returned to England and formed a Church at Southwark. In the order adopted by

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this Church, we find a remarkable approximation to that adopted in the great majority of Congregational Churches to-day. The offices of "Elder" and "Teacher" were merged in the single office of the "Pastor," who was responsible for the spiritual oversight of the Community, he being assisted in his duties by "Deacons," who also undertook the specifically business part of the Church affairs. This bold modification of the prevailing order was not immediately followed by many other Churches ; indeed, the question was raised, "whether Mr. Jacob's Congregation be a true Church or no ?" But by the action of men like Ainsworth, Robinson, and Jacob, Congregationalism was saved from drifting towards a nondescript amalgam of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism.

2. Along with the aristocratic tendency in government, there was, among the early Congregational Churches, a very rigid and searching system of discipline. In some Communities it was the custom to hold a meeting once a week for its enforcement. The most intimate and private matters of the members were reviewed and judgment

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passed thereon. Taken in conjunction with the power of the Eldership, the system threatened to develop into a veritable inquisition, in which the claims of authority over the personal religious life of the individual were pushed to the extreme point reached by the Church of Rome in her institution of the confessional. In their earnest desire to secure the purity and loyalty of the members of the Church the sense of proportion was obscured, the idea of responsibility to the Church invaded that region of personal religion in which responsibility to God is the ruling factor. The Churches did not sufficiently regard the legitimate claims of a spiritual individualism.

The system soon became the fruitful cause of difficulties in various Societies. Its drift was towards a certain pettifogging tyranny which aroused intense resentment and led to serious quarrels, threatening the effectiveness of the Churches, and turning them aside from the main issues with which they were properly concerned. "The large and generous wisdom in judging of other men, which is one of the

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mellow fruits of disciplined and cultivated saintliness, was not likely to be common among these enthusiastic and vehement reformers. Every man was likely to impose his own moral ideas upon all his brethren, and to insist that, if in any details of character and conduct they varied from the law which his own conscience approved, they were disloyal to Christ. . . . Church discipline was, therefore, certain to be too inquisitorial. It was certain to interfere unnecessarily, unwisely, and sometimes most unjustly and harshly, with individual freedom. It was certain to disregard those varieties of temperament, and those varieties of social traditions and customs, which vary the application of the unchanging ethical laws of Christ.”¹

The exiled Church at Amsterdam, under the pastoral care of Francis Johnson, was rent in twain by a heated quarrel over the cut of the dresses worn by the Pastor’s wife, and the height of her shoe heels.

There is a real problem for Congregationalism, which insists so strongly on the personal faithfulness to Christ of its

¹ Dale, “History of English Congregationalism,” p. 197.

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members, and the reality of their discipleship, underlying this question of discipline. If the principle that the Christian man is he who is "in Christ" has any reality, then it is necessary that the Church should have some right to see that this first requirement of membership is adequately fulfilled. On the other hand, a too close scrutiny into the personal life of the members is apt to develop a petty tyranny, which trenches on ground from which any external authority is justly barred. To set up a system of rules and regulations for conduct which must be absolutely obeyed, tends to the narrow, artificial, religiosity of Pharisaism, and to the destruction of that spontaneity of personal religion which gives it so much of its value and strength. | It makes it possible for ignorance and intolerance to rule the broader, saner, spirit of religion.

It may, indeed, be conceded that in present-day Congregationalism discipline is too lax, that it has almost entirely disappeared. He would be a daring member of a Church, at this time, who should propose the exclusion of members on the

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ground of "worldliness." And perhaps it is not to be desired that such should be attempted. A spirit might come in, that way, which would be more fatal to the wellbeing of the Church than a too lax observance of the requirements of personal apartness from the world. At the same time, it should be fully recognized among us that loyalty to Christ does involve the limitation of one's freedom in certain directions, where the man who does not recognize the authority of Christ chooses to take a wider liberty. The true safeguard of the Church against the intrusion of unworthy members lies in the cultivation by the Church of such a high spiritual tone, that only those who are in full sympathy with it would desire to be admitted or to retain their membership.

The disciplinary system common among the Churches of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was maintained with more or less strictness during the two following, and the pettiness with which it was sometimes enforced is to a large extent responsible for the stigma of Philistinism which, in the minds of those who have no

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intimate knowledge of the broadness of Congregational idealism and have not come in contact with its culture, still attaches to their conception of it. But, as indicated above, it is a question whether in the breakdown of the disciplinary system of earlier days we have not gone too far in the opposite direction, and tolerate a laxness which ill accords with our fundamental conception of Christian discipleship.

3. Another matter in which we find some confusion of ideas, some need of a juster perspective among the early Congregationalists, is in respect to the question of Independency.

In the act of breaking away from the established religion, the element of independency filled a large place in the thoughts of the pioneers. They stood for the independency of the Church from State control in matters of religion and independency of the single Church from the control of other Societies of believers, however closely allied in principles and polity. The presence of Christ with the "two or three" justified their independence from outside control. It was this concep-

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tion which separated the Congregational Churches from their fellow-Puritans of the Presbyterian order. There was no place for Presbyterial authority among the Churches of Reformation Congregationalism. But it should be remembered that "Independency" is more or less a negative term. It is critical rather than constructive. It indicates a certain relation toward other units and communities ; it does not convey any indication of the inward character or quality of the Society or individual that claims it. It is implicit in certain principles and flows from them ; it is not, by itself, a principle worth contending for : if it stand by itself, it is disruptive ; if it be held out of proportion to other factors in the situation, it is destructive of Christian unity. Some critics of Congregationalism are blind to every other factor, and hence regard it as the embodiment of the spirit of schism. That is the case of the modern Anglican who loves to speak of the Congregationalist as a "Dissenter," and misses the essential significance of the movement he criticizes in ignorance. It should also be added that

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this very limited and barren conception of what is involved in their own order is held by some Congregationalists of the present day, with the consequent impoverishment of their ideals and the serious hampering of the development of the Community to which they belong. They sacrifice the freedom and efficiency of the Congregational Church to the maintenance of a rigid and narrow isolation, which is, in itself, not only useless, but, if it be pressed beyond a certain point, hostile to the principles which lie at the root of Congregationalism. A Church that stands for independency *only* is not a Church at all, in any sense that is worth while, and certainly not in the New Testament sense: it is not much more than a religious club.

“Congregationalism denotes a *positive* theory of the organization and powers of Christian Churches (a theory as positive and sharply defined as that of Anglicanism or Catholicism). This theory maintains: (1) That Churches are not in the strictest sense of the word ‘voluntary Societies,’ but Societies founded by Christ Himself, to which it is His will that all those who

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believe in Him should belong ; (2) That in every Christian Church the will of Christ is the supreme authority, and that in the reception and exclusion of members, in the election of officers, in the conduct of worship, and in every other Church act, it is to be implicitly obeyed ; (3) That there is an infinite contrast between those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the human race, and those who do not : and that only those who have thus received Him should be members of Christian Churches ; (4) That by the will of Christ all members of a Christian Church—not the officers only—are directly responsible to Him for maintaining His authority ; and (5) That as an inference from the last principle every Society of Christians organized for Christian worship, instruction, and fellowship is a Christian Church and is *Independent* of external control.”¹

“Independency,” then, comes into Congregationalism, according to one of its ablest and most trusted exponents, as an inference, a necessary inference truly, but

¹ Dale, “History of English Congregationalism,” p. 374-5.

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yet as an inference, which must therefore be held with sufficient elasticity as not to conflict with, or hamper, the principles out of which it is inferred.

There were at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, that period in English religious life when new ideas of more or less spiritual value were being thrust up from the quickened consciousness of the age, many conceptions, and Societies embodying them, which had no connection with Congregational principles, and were in some cases anti-pathetic. These also called themselves "independent." Their claims to independency were urged on quite other grounds than those on which Congregational independency stood. Religious "independency simply affirms the right of any Society of private persons to meet together for worship and religious instruction and exhortation without being interfered with by any external authority."¹ The right may be affirmed from a variety of points of view. Congregational independency affirms the right, distinctly and definitely,

¹ *Id.*: p. 375.

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as arising from a certain conception of the relation of individuals and Societies to Jesus Christ.

It is not to be wondered at that with a vivid sense of that relationship as its fundamental principle, it should lay strong emphasis on the idea of independency derived from it. The real danger, a danger which, insufficiently guarded against, resulted in much confusion and some mistakes, lay in holding the inference out of perspective with the main principles. The over-insistence on the element of independency created an unfortunate impression about Congregationalism in the minds of its critics which arose from confounding it with other "independents," whose company was not, in some cases, either desirable or creditable.

The adjustment of the place of independency in Congregationalism has been the work of succeeding centuries. It proceeded too slowly until the end of the eighteenth century. Congregationalists forgot (some even now forget) that their independency is an inference derived from principles much more fundamental, that

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they are independents by virtue of their Congregationalism and not vice versa, that to make their Congregationalism more effective it may be necessary to modify the expression of their independence.

Since the early years of the nineteenth century we have been approaching a more reasonable attitude on this matter, as witnessed by the formation of County Unions of Congregational Churches, and still further by the formation of the National Union of England and Wales. These movements within our Order amount to a repudiation of the idea of isolation, and their success proves that the rigid independency of earlier days may be modified without sacrificing anything that is essential to the spiritual power of the order.

There is manifest in our Churches at the present time a strong tendency to carry that modification still farther so as to secure a fuller realization of the unity which is strength, and to make more effective in their modern setting the principles for which we stand. In such matters as the exchange of Pastorates; the forma-

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tion of a Sustentation Fund for its Ministry; the assistance rendered to weak Churches which are needed in their particular localities, but are unable to maintain their ground unaided against adverse circumstances, the prevention of a suicidal over-lapping of Churches—in all these and other matters there is necessarily involved a limitation of absolute independency in certain directions which, while leaving the spiritual independence of the Churches unimpaired, will add much to the opportunities and force of Congregationalism as a power in the religious life of the age. There is sufficient statesmanship in our order to carry out this policy with safety and profit to our Churches.

4. The principle of entire religious liberty, of the absolute lordship of conscience, that no external authority has the right to force men to accept any form of belief, or, indeed, any belief at all, or to participate in any religious observance, is now one of the commonplaces of Congregationalism. Every man must be left free to adopt such doctrinal forms, and to worship God through such ritual acts, as most commend themselves to his mind and

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conscience. Or if he be so foolish as to repudiate all forms of faith and to ignore the claims of God over his heart and life, there is no human authority that can justly refuse him such liberty. Not only among Congregationalists, but everywhere, among those who have any real perception of spiritual values, this position is readily conceded.

The recognition of this principle is undoubtedly an inheritance from the pioneers of Congregationalism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was they who laid the foundation of the religious freedom which in the twentieth century is regarded as one of the inalienable human rights. When they first proclaimed it people regarded it as shocking, dangerous, and revolutionary. An idea which, if allowed, would destroy religion altogether. One cannot be surprised that under the Elizabethan and Stuart regimes such a principle should be regarded as implying one of the worst forms of rebellion.

Its enunciation united against it, not only the Anglo-Catholic party, but the Puritans within the Establishment. The

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Presbyterians, who had much to gain in other directions by an alliance with the Separatists, regarded the principle as subversive of religion.

It must, however, be acknowledged that the early Congregationalists did not at first recognize the full logical implications of the doctrine of religious freedom which they so boldly preached. They were clear and emphatic in their repudiation of the right of the State to force the faith and practice of anyone along lines which were in opposition to the dictates of conscience. The supreme authority in matters of religion, wherever else it might lie, certainly did not lie with the civil power. The right to legislate in these matters lay, if anywhere, with the Church ; the intrusion of the State into this region was nothing less than a blasphemous tyranny. And seeing that, for the Congregationalist, the Church was the particular Society of fellow-believers gathered in any one Community, whatever right to control faith and practice might lie with the Church, it could not be exercised upon any individual outside the particular Church so acting, it could only

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be exercised by the Church strictly in relation to its own members. Where differences arose within the Society, differences which could not be composed, there was nothing for it but separation, either by the withdrawal of the dissidents, or by their exclusion. When such separation had been effected the authority of the Church ceased. Seeing that the State had no power to force the conscience of any, it had no right to interfere with, or forbid, or punish, the seceders; they must be left to the divine judgment which was the ultimate authority.

It is very doubtful how far beyond this position they were prepared to go. Though Barrowe and Greenwood declared that "the prince cannot compel any to be a member of the Church, or the Church to receive any without assurance by public confession of their own faith; or to retain any longer than they continue and walk orderly in the faith," they at the same time acknowledged "that the prince ought to compel all their subjects to the hearing of God's Word in the public exercises of the Church."

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“In 1596, the exiles in Amsterdam and their brethren who remained in London, published a confession of faith. In this they declare, ‘That it is the office of princes and magistrates, who by the ordinance of God are supreme Governors under Him over all persons and causes within their realms and dominions, to suppress and root out by their authority all false ministries, voluntary (i.e. originating in the human will, not in obedience to the divine law) religions and counterfeit worship of God . . . to enforce all their subjects, whether ecclesiastical or civil, to do their duties to God and men.’”¹

They did not seem to realize that the question, what are “false ministries, voluntary religions, and the counterfeit worship of God,” was the very question at issue between themselves and their opponents. In persecuting the Congregationalists, the prince and the magistrates were firmly convinced that they were “suppressing and rooting out false ministries, voluntary religions, and counterfeit worship of God.”

¹ Dale, “History of English Congregationalism,” pp. 169-70.

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In sending Barrowe and Greenwood to the gallows, the prince sought to compel them to the hearing of God's Word in the public exercises of the only Church which she recognized as a legitimate Church.

The fatal flaw in their position lay in the fact that they were not willing to grant the freedom to reject religion itself if one so determined. While they insisted that every man has the right to choose how he shall serve God, they hesitated to allow freedom to choose between God and Baal. They did not realize that to allow the former carries with it, logically, to allow the latter. They did not fully recognize that any religion which is forced is absolutely without value; is, in fact, no religion at all. While no one has any right to make his faith or his unbelief a nuisance to his neighbours, everyone has the right, as far as human relationships are concerned, to believe anything, or nothing at all. To compel a man to be religious, in any sense in which religion counts, is a frank impossibility.

In acknowledging the halting inconsistency of the early Congregationalists in

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this matter, it should be said that they were influenced by facts which lay in the peculiar circumstances of their time. The wild, extravagant forms in which revolt from the religious tyranny of a thousand years expressed itself, the rank and poisonous growths of atheism and blasphemous unbelief at which they, no less than their persecutors, were outraged, on the one hand; and on the other, the standing danger to their own liberties involved in even a tolerance of Romanism, accounted for their hesitation to carry the principle of absolute religious freedom to its logical conclusion. In the latter case there was much to justify their hesitation. The Roman party, whatever it be to-day, was at that time a dangerous political menace to the newly won liberties of England. In placing it outside the limits of toleration, they were actuated as much by the instincts of political liberty, as by any desire to curtail the exercise of religious freedom.

Swiftly, however, they moved to the more consistent position of unfettered religious liberty for all men, liberty even to reject

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religion. In their conflict with Presbyterianism under the Long Parliament, it was made plain to them that, unless the principle were held in its absolute form, any limitation of it might be turned against even the most highly spiritual conceptions and practices of religion which happened to be in conflict with the views of the party that held the reins of power. In insisting on the rights of conscience before God, they laid the foundations of religious freedom wider than they at first imagined. But when the necessity for the full application of the principle was forced upon them, they readily accepted it. The line of development of Congregationalism has been one which, almost from the first, has involved that full liberty in spiritual matters which has now become one of the fundamental conceptions of British citizenship.

Along these lines, as along others which we have not space to discuss, Congregationalism pursued its development working out its principles, finding the appropriate and adequate forms for their expression, adjusting its perspective,

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fashioning its polity in harmony with New Testament ideals, yet escaping a merely slavish adhesion to primitive forms for their own sake. The Congregationalism of the twentieth century is, in some respects, different from that of the sixteenth, but the difference lies in its expression and not in its principles, in its accidents and not in its essentials. All for which our order stands to-day has its roots, not only in the sixteenth century, but in the first, and its justification in the spiritual principles which the Churches of the Apostolic period were founded to express.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

IN the preceding chapters an attempt has been made to indicate the main principles of Congregationalism, by a sketch, necessarily rapid and impressionist, of their origin in the New Testament Church, their resurrection after more than a thousand years of submergence, and their development during the last three hundred years in which the principles of the apostolic Churches, re-stated after the Reformation, have been adjusting themselves to adequate and appropriate expression.

Those principles as traceable in the New Testament were indicated in Chapter I (pages 7-9), and no better account of them, as re-stated by their post-Reformation exponents, could be given than that set forth by Dr. Dale in his *History* and quoted in Chapter III (pages 65-6). For a fuller exposition and proof of them, the reader

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may be referred to Dr. Dale's "Manual of Congregational Principles" (published by the Congregational Union of England and Wales), in which a lucid statement of present-day Congregationalism will be found.

In the present chapter, a brief statement will be made of some of the main features in the organization of polity and worship as it obtains to-day among the Churches of our order.

(1) In the Churches of the New Testament there are two offices which stand out unmistakably, they are those of Presbyter (or Elder) and Deacon. Toward the close of the apostolic period a third office comes into view, that of Bishop. In some cases, the Elders and Bishops are referred to as though they were the same officers under different names. At any rate, as the Bishop begins to take a distinctive place, he is simply the Elder who presides (either in turn or permanently) over the Presbyterial College. So that, apparently, it would be fair to describe the Ministry of the apostolic Churches as consisting of Elders, one of whom presides over the

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Council of Elders and the meetings of the Church, and Deacons.

In the modern Congregational Church the Pastor fills the place of the Bishop in the later apostolic period, while the offices of Elder and Deacon are merged in the modern Diaconate. If the Bishop of the Primitive Church has any successor in these days, he is to be found, not in the episcopal palace of the Roman or the Anglican Church, but in the Manse of the Congregational Church.

The ministry of the Pastor is only a specialized form of the ministry of the Diaconal council; he presides over the meetings of the Diaconate and of the Church; he is chiefly responsible for the spiritual oversight of the Church, though in association with the Deacons; to him the work of teaching and exhorting mainly belongs. There is no distinction of caste as between himself and his fellow-members; he possesses no magical powers and discharges no function which, *per se*, differentiates him from, or sets him above, the general Community of Christians to which he belongs. He discharges no function

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which, on occasion, may not be legitimately discharged by any member of the Diaconate, or, indeed, by any member of the Church.

The Pastor is elected by the whole Church. The election is not regarded as conferring the right to exercise his ministry, that is conferred by Christ alone. If a man be not a Christ-called minister, his ministry is, *ipso facto*, invalid. If he be Christ-called, no Church can question or abrogate his ministry. The election is but the recognition by the Church of an already existing fact, and its appropriation of the fact for its own service.

When the choice of a Pastor is properly and appropriately made, it is done in an atmosphere of prayer, and with an earnest desire to give effect, in the election, to the divine will. The *cong   d'  lire* in the case of a Congregational Pastor comes from the Lord of the Church Himself. No outside body has any right to force any man on a Church. There may be room (and many among us would emphasize this) for the counsel and advice of some third party, so that the Church may be the more assured that it is

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choosing rightly, but the final choice should rest with the Church.

The Deacons are associated with the Pastor in the general oversight of the Church, and in the conduct of its business. They share his responsibilities, and support him by their counsel and co-operation; they act with him in guiding the policy of the Community and in directing its activities. They are not merely charged with the administrative business of the Church, but have their place in its spiritual activities. In the absence of the Pastor, or during a vacancy in the Pastorate, they discharge many of the functions which, otherwise, are discharged by him. The office of Deacon is not subordinate to that of Pastor, but complementary. Deacons are elected by the Church, and in the election there is implicit the belief that the choice of the Church is the medium through which the choice of Christ is expressed.

It may be conceded that these high notions of the offices of the Congregational Church do not always prevail in actual practice. In choosing a Minister or Deacons the ideal set forth above is marred by the

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intrusion of unworthy motives ; the relations between Pastor and People are not always ideal by a very long way. But whenever there is any lowering of the ideal, in that measure there is a departure from the true Congregational principle.

It may be noted that it is becoming a very general custom to remit the management of the business side of the Church life to a specially elected Committee on which the Diaconate is largely represented. This Committee is concerned with such matters as the upkeep of the Church buildings, their proper equipment, the management of the Church finances, the transaction of any legal business, and affairs of a similar character. The advantage of this arrangement being, among other things, that it gives scope, to the profit of the Church, for Christian service to those of its members who are specially gifted in business affairs, but who are not on the Diaconate ; deepening their interest in the work of the Church, and helping them to realize their responsibilities for its welfare. It also sets free the Deacons to devote more of their time and energy to the spiritual

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work of the Church, in which they can render valuable assistance to the Pastor and contribute very effectively to the spiritual quickening of the Church.

(2) As will readily be understood from what has already been said, the Membership of the Church plays a very important part in the Congregational system. Congregational Churches are "gathered" Churches, as contrasted with the parish system of the Anglican and Presbyterian (established) Churches. They are composed of men and women whose membership involves a definite profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a definite pledge to endeavour to realize in the daily life the fullest personal loyalty to Him. Even the fact of Baptism does not carry with it the fact of membership; all that Baptism represents has to be deliberately appropriated by the individual before one can be duly qualified for membership of the Church. There is, therefore, ideally at any rate, some responsibility attaching to the Church in admitting candidates to membership. Care ought to be taken that the person admitted does fulfil the con-

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ditions which membership implies, and that, so long as it continues, those conditions are fulfilled.

The general custom is for the Minister, or representatives of the Diaconate, to have some conversation with the applicant. If the conversation be satisfactory, the report of the Pastor or the Deacons is acted upon by the Church, and the candidate is admitted.

In some Churches the reception of new members is a solemn and impressive ceremony. Either at an ordinary meeting of the Church, or at the Communion Service (which is the most solemn meeting of the Society), the Pastor, in the name of the Church, gives the right hand of fellowship to the newly admitted member, welcoming him thus into the privileges and responsibilities of the Church.

This ceremony of recognition, however, is not always observed, much to the loss of the Church neglecting it.

Congregationalism needs to place as much emphasis as possible on the privileges and responsibilities, the duties and distinction of membership of the Christian

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Church. That membership "means, and means intensely,"—this is the truth which Congregationalism is charged to magnify before the world.

It has always, since the heroic days of the first century, been a fatal weakness with Christianity, that membership of the Church tends to be cheapened down, that the radical distinction between a Christian man and the non-Christian has not been sufficiently sharp and clear-cut. This was one of the results which could not but follow the sacerdotalizing of the Church after the first century. If Congregationalism stands for anything to-day, it stands for giving reality and intensity to the fact of being "in Christ," and every element in the life and practice of the Church which tends to heighten the value and meaning of membership ought to be very carefully cherished.

Placing a high value on membership of the Church implies, as has been pointed out above, something in the way of Church discipline. There ought to be some means for keeping the life of the Church pure and the discipleship of the members real and

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vital. If a member falls into a degenerate condition, becomes unfaithful to Jesus Christ, there ought to be some means of dealing with him. There is in Congregationalism, nowadays, no recognized system of Church discipline. In the most flagrant cases withdrawal from fellowship with the offending member is an obvious necessity, and probably few Congregational Churches would hesitate to take that line.

The difficulty arises where there is no flagrant or aggressive act of disloyalty, but a general lowering of the tone of discipleship. In cases of a pronounced spirit of worldliness, or a persistent abstention from the service and worship of the Church, the value and reality of membership ought in some way to be asserted as against such degenerating members. How this may best be done is one of the practical problems of the Congregational Church at the present day. An arbitrary standard of Christian morality cannot be thought of ; a pettifogging, hypercritical, ignorant Pharisaism must, at all costs, be avoided. It is so difficult to find a standard of judgment which shall be effective, yet not

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narrow, which shall reflect the general Christian atmosphere without being individualistic.

It would be mere blindness to facts to deny that there are Churches of our order which stand much in need of purging, in which some of the members, at least, are unworthy of the Christian name, and degrade the reputation of the Church in the eyes of the world. But Congregational Churches are not by any means singular in this respect. The quality of its Church membership is, one may say, without being accused of Pharisaic pride, as high as that of any branch of the Christian Church. If the majority of the members are careful to demand from themselves a high standard of consistency, those of the Fellowship who are becoming lax will, by the influence of the others, be reclaimed; or, if that fail, they will find the atmosphere so uncongenial that they themselves will settle the matter by actual withdrawal, or a virtual withdrawal which can be taken by the Church as a declining of membership.

At all events, our Churches do need to realize that it is the quality of member-

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ship, rather than its numbers, that matters most ; that it is better to shed off the unworthy member (if he cannot be won to greater loyalty) than to merely maintain a high statistical standard. It cannot be too emphatically stated that, for Congregationalism, it is essential that membership of the Church should “ mean, and mean intensely.”

The Catholicity of Congregationalism is evidenced in its willingness to receive into the Church members “ by transfer,” not only from Churches from the same order, but from other Communion ; the only requirement being in cases of transfer, that the Christian character of the newcomer shall have witness borne to it by those from whom he comes.

(3) In the matter of the organization and forms of worship there is a wide variety in Congregationalism.

Each Church arranges its forms of worship as its members find most helpful. This is involved in the freedom, the spiritual sufficiency of the Church in Christ, for which we stand. No outside authority has the right to dictate to the

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particular Church its forms of worship ; each Church is responsible to God alone for the methods of its approach to Him, and the symbols it uses in its worship. The justification of this freedom lies, not only in principle, but in the logic and common sense of human nature.

In most Congregations of worshippers there is a predominating emotional type, and each type needs its appropriate and harmonious form for the expression of its emotions. In some Churches a simple service, simple to the point of bareness, as it would seem to some of an opposite temperament, is found to be the most helpful channel for worship. In others, a more elaborate, æsthetic, form of service best expresses and stimulates the spiritual emotions of the worshippers. We have no "Book of Common Prayer." There is a tendency in some of our Churches toward the adoption of a liturgical, or semi-liturgical, form of service, though it is not very general. A deep-rooted suspicion of "forms of prayer" exists among Congregationalists, a fear lest prayers "read out of a book" should lose their spontaneity

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and their reality, lest the use of "forms" should make the worship formal. This attitude is not very consistent, since it is impossible to conduct even the simplest and barest service without the use of "forms" of some sort. The reality and intensity of worship does not so much depend on the forms used, as on the spirit which is brought to the act. There are some Congregations which boast of the simplicity of their services and their abhorrence of any shred of a liturgical element, which very strictly limit all outward participation in the service, with the exception of the hymns, to the officiating minister, as though he were some Roman Priest celebrating Mass, and themselves maintain a frigid silence from beginning to end of the service, not even being guilty of a responsive "amen" to a prayer; and yet, in spite of their boasted simplicity, the service is absolutely dead and uninspired, void of power to quicken any impulse of devotion. Why should Congregationalists, of all people, insist on the isolation of the Minister from the people in the act of prayer? There are some Congregations

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which do not object to sing "amen" to the hymns, some of them being really prayers, but which would be scandalized at the suggestion of a choral "amen" at the end of the prayers, or the Lord's prayer being sung to a simple chant. While still as watchful as ever against the intrusion of a deadening formalism into worship, many Churches might very profitably bring a little more consecrated common sense, and a little less prejudice, to the consideration of this subject.

In spite of the above criticism, there is no doubt that a very sincere desire to make the services more reverent and devotional in form as well as in spirit, is very generally manifest, and the increasing inclination to the partial introduction of a liturgical element in the conduct of public worship is indicative of that desire.

(4) Congregationalists recognize two sacraments, Baptism and The Lord's Supper; though, perhaps, owing to the associations of the word "sacrament," most Congregationalists would prefer to call them "ordinances." This word avoids the magical element imported into them

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by sacerdotalism, which we entirely repudiate. They are the dramatization, as it were, of certain truths of the Gospel which are of its very essence, and which are impressively and appropriately expressed by such dramatization. The mere observance of them, apart from a spiritual participation in the truths for which they stand, has no value.

In the ordinance of Baptism there is expressed the truth of the redemption of the Race by God in Jesus Christ. We are not our own, we belong to God in Christ. Baptism creates no new fact; it is the acknowledgment of an already existing fact. It does not make us children of God, we are that already; it is the symbolic act in which the fact is expressed. It is not a profession of faith on the part of the one baptized, it is a confession of faith on the part of those who carry out the ordinance.

Herein is the single point of division between the Congregationalists and the Baptists, who in every other respect are Congregationalist, holding the same spiritual principles of the Church and following

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the same polity. The Baptist regards the act of Baptism as a profession of faith in Jesus Christ by the participant, it is his act rather than the act of the Church, it is only to be undertaken by those who can, intelligently, make such a profession; young children are not fit subjects for Baptism. It is with the Baptists essentially "*Believers' Baptism*," an act in which a particular individual experience is dramatized; while for the Congregationalist it is the dramatization of a universal truth applicable to all, whether believers or not. The common statement that the difference between the Baptist and his fellow-Congregationalist is only one of "more or less water" misses the point of the difference. It is not a question so much of the mode of the ordinance as its meaning.

"In the Lord's Supper (i) the Church commemorates Christ, and especially the death of Christ, in a manner appointed by Christ Himself. (ii) Christ communicates to the Church (i.e. to the participating members, and so to the Church) whatever is represented by the bread and the wine.¹

¹ Dale, "Manual of Congregational Principles," pp. 142, 143.

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The Congregationalist view of the Lord's Supper is, practically, Zwinglian. The efficacy of the ordinance depends entirely on the spiritual sincerity of the participant, it has no magical efficacy. It is a commemorative act in which all the spiritual potencies that lie in the personal relation between the disciple and his Lord are drawn to a focus and intensified in the heart of the disciple. It expresses all that Christ has achieved for the disciple and all that the disciple owes to Him in return. It is a thanksgiving and a dedication ; it expresses the fellowship which exists between the brethren who share the common life in Christ ; it is the communion of the disciple with Christ, and therefore the communion in Christ of the disciples with one another. The bread and the wine retain all through the ordinance their natural qualities, nothing in them is changed by the words of consecration ; they are symbols, and nothing more than symbols, of the body broken and the blood shed for our redemption ; to partake of these elements is nothing more than the symbolic representation of the spiritual

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union of the redeeming Christ and the redeemed disciple.

It should be said that there is no one view of the ordinance which is binding on the Congregationalist. Though the sentences above represent the predominant attitude among us to the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, various modifications of the view contained in them are to be found. Indeed, there is no definitely expressed obligation of the two ordinances. In regard to Baptism, there are many who do not feel the obligation and do not observe it. There are not a few Congregationalists who have never been baptized. Whatever loss attaches to the neglect of the act affects, not the unbaptized person, but the Church neglecting it. Again, there are some members of Congregational Churches who take the view of Baptism held by our Baptist brethren, and have themselves participated in the rite as observed by them. They do not consider that this difference of view justifies the existence of two separate Communions and retain their membership in a Congregational, rather than in a specifically Baptist,

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Church. There is, no doubt, a growing tendency to soften down the division between the two Denominations; to consider a closer approximation of the two bodies. An amalgamation of the Baptists and Congregationalists in the future is, some of us think, a much to be desired consummation to which we hopefully look forward.

In regard to the Lord's Supper, although by far the large majority of Churches hold participation in its observance to be an obligation on the disciple and make it a condition of membership, in some few Churches the matter is left to the conscience of the individual member and, consequently, attendance at the service is not made an absolute condition of membership. Among Baptists of the stricter sort, participation in the Lord's Supper is a privilege allowed only to those who have professed faith in Christ through Baptism. This is a logical position from their point of view. But the predominating custom among Baptists pushes strict logic aside and all members of other Christian Bodies are admitted to the ordinance. Among Congregationalists

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there is no "fencing of the Table," it is not held as an exclusive privilege of membership : in most Churches when the service is announced an invitation to participate is given to "all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth," and one's justification in participating is left to the individual conscience to decide.

(5) It need hardly be pointed out that, arising out of his fundamental conception of the Church, the Congregationalist holds very high views about the relation between State and Church. "It is of the very substance of Congregationalism that the civil magistrate has no authority over the faith, discipline, or the worship of the Church. The denial of the ecclesiastical supremacy of the Crown was the crime for which the early Congregational martyrs were sent to the gallows. In recent times it has become the universal conviction of Congregationalists that a Church cannot receive support from the State without sacrificing some measure of its spiritual freedom, and that a Church must therefore decline to accept political privilege and maintenance

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from national revenues in order to preserve its loyalty to Christ.”¹

Any other view than this would be radically inconsistent with the conceptions of the nature of the Church which we believe to be set forth in the New Testament. The Church is, in the very nature of the case, independent of the State. It is conceding the very crown rights of the Redeemer when the Church allows itself to take direction in spiritual matters from the State; it is rendering to Cæsar the things that are God’s. It may be, under certain circumstances, the duty of the Church to rebuke and withstand the policy of the State, and this cannot be done consistently if the Church acknowledges the over-lordship of the State. The Congregationalist protests against the patronage of religion by the State not simply, as we are often credited, out of jealousy at the recognition and prestige given to one section of the Church to the prejudice of others, but on far higher grounds. We object, as members of the State, to be charged with responsibility for the ordering and control of a Church from

¹ Dale, “Manual of Congregational Principles,” p. 191.

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which, in many respects, we differ; we object as citizens to exercise any such control since we conceive that it is wrong for us to have any share in such control, it is a usurpation of the rights of the Church which happens to be established with which we do not care to be associated. Among many of the Anglican clergy this high view of the relation between Church and State is gaining a strong hold, and some of them are consistent enough to advocate disestablishment on this ground; though there are still a number of them who need to learn the truth of the old saying that "you cannot have your cake and eat it." They cannot enjoy the independence which goes along with freedom from State control and at the same time enjoy the privilege of State patronage. If they enjoy the latter it can only be by the sacrifice of the former.

A Church always becomes more spiritually effective when it is free from the control of the State, and it is out of a genuine desire to see a sister Church benefiting from that larger spiritual liberty that we urge the policy of distablishment.

Along with disestablishment, disendow-

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ment cannot but go. If the State is to have no control over the government and policy of the Church, then the State must not be expected to contribute to the support of the Church. It is a safe and just principle that when the State pays it is entitled to a proportionate measure of control. We recognize this fully in such a matter as a national system of Education. The same principle applies to religion. Because we say that the State should not control the Church, we are also bound to say that it should not be asked to contribute to the support of the Church.

Among the Congregationalists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this was not so clearly perceived as it is to-day. In the Colonies of New England, especially, an attempt was made to combine the Congregational polity with the establishment of Congregationalism as the State religion. In these Colonies it was, to a large extent, the Church that controlled the State; citizenship was only granted to those who were members of a Congregational Church, the State was expected to support the Church, but in return there was no corres-

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ponding control of the Church by the State. The incongruity of the position worked itself out to the inevitable result of disestablishment and disendowment. It may be possible for an Episcopal Church, or a Presbyterian, to maintain itself for many centuries as an established and endowed Church, but the very principles of Congregationalism are disruptive of any such relation between the State and itself.

(6) There remains but one other point in the principles and practice of modern Congregationalism upon which we have space to dwell. There is no such thing as a specific Congregational Theology. We have no Church Creeds, the basis of Church membership is not theological but spiritual. We exist, not for the purpose of maintaining any one set of doctrines about Christ, but for the purpose of cultivating and developing the life of the disciple in Christ, and for the purpose of extending His kingdom in the world. Church membership does not involve the acceptance of any given theological statement or subscription to any "Articles" of belief. A statement of "things generally believed among us"

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may be issued by a number of Congregationalists, but it has no Church authority and no binding force upon any. We stand for spiritual principles, not for theological dogmas. It is true that Congregational theology approximates to a certain type, a distinctly evangelical type ; our principles are inconsistent with any other than an evangelical theology. But the individual is entirely free to fashion his theological interpretations of the great truths of our religion as may most commend themselves to his conscience in the sight of God.

And this position arises, necessarily, from the basal conception of the Christian as one who is in intimate personal union with Jesus Christ. When such an intimate personal relationship exists the disciple may safely be left to the guidance of the indwelling spirit of Christ.

In the early days of Reformation Congregationalism the predominant theology was that of Geneva, but a high and rigid Calvinism will hardly be met with to-day among the more thoughtful Congregationalists. Any attempt to force any specific theological doctrines, or to give an

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official authority to any credal statements would be passionately resented ; we are content to think and act in the atmosphere of John Robinson's broadminded spiritual declaration that " he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word." We take His Word as the lamp to our feet and the light to our path, and follow fearlessly where He seems to lead.

CHAPTER V

ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTLOOK

“THE tree is judged by its fruits”: a spiritual “pragmatism” has, at any rate, some justification in the teaching of Jesus. Congregationalism is quite willing to be judged by this standard. Does it work? Has it been justified by its achievements? Has it been an effective force for helping forward the coming of the Kingdom of God? What is its outlook for the future?

A brief attempt to answer these questions will, fittingly, bring to a close this short study of Congregationalism.

Organization is a necessity for any movement that aims at definite and lasting achievement: force has to be harnessed and conditioned before it can do work. In every distinctively spiritual movement there is always a certain impatience with organization. The Spirit should be free, it is said, to do its work in its own way and

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after its own methods ; you cannot limit the work of the Spirit of God to the lines of any human organization. And when you have got your organization, you will be trusting more to its mechanism and less to the Spirit. It is just possible that the Spirit may have left the mechanism altogether, and because your organization runs for a while by its own momentum, you are unaware that the motive power has gone. It is true that, in proportion as one realizes the Spirit of God as the driving force of any great movement, there is deep suspicion of any attempt to direct or limit its operation along the lines of organization.

But, on the other hand, it is clear that the Spirit of God will do nothing for human redemption without human co-operation. It is not a question of what God might do, but of what He actually does ; and there is no doubt that the divine method is to work through the human instrument. The practical question is not, whether a spiritual movement should or should not be conducted along the lines of human organization or left free of any human instrument, but what is the appropriate organization

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through which the purpose of the divine Spirit may be best achieved ? Our problem is how to frame our organization in harmony with the divine purpose, how to maintain the vital link always between the inspiring Spirit and the human instrument.

It is not to be wondered at that the Reformation Congregationalists were suspicious of organization. The freedom and power of the Gospel had been strangled by a thousand years of over-organization, the forms of which had, many of them, been directly hostile to, and destructive of, the spiritual truths of the Gospel. The single Churches were jealous of any outside interference ; synodical gatherings of the Churches, or of their representatives, might be held for mutual counsel and advice, but even these were regarded with some amount of suspicion and were not invested with any executive authority. They had suffered so many things at the hand of " ecclesiastical authority " that they were in no mind to create even the shadow of a new authority among themselves. The exigences of persecution did not suffice to bring into being

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any actual union of the Churches other than a purely spiritual and sentimental fellowship. Things continued in this fashion for more than two centuries until, toward the close of the eighteenth century, there began to manifest itself among the Congregational Churches a movement which resulted in the federation of some of them into County Unions. This was largely the product of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, when among the Churches of the independent order a new spirit of Christian fellowship began to assert itself and the desire for closer union among those who, broadly, held the same great spiritual principles of evangelical religion, and adopted a similar polity. Added to this there began to dawn upon them the fact that for the purposes of the more aggressive work of the Church some more or less definite union was highly desirable. With the exception of one or two Baptist County Associations which claim to trace back their origin to the earlier half of the seventeenth century, the movement toward the federation into County Unions dates from the end of the

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eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth.

These Unions were purely voluntary, they did not at first include, by any means, all the Churches in the given area; they had no executive authority; they existed for the purposes of mutual encouragement and help and for the carrying on together of common aggressive work for the spread of the Kingdom of God in their own areas. Strictly limited as were the objects contemplated in their association and extremely jealous as were the separate Churches of anything approaching the control of their Church affairs by the County Union, much good resulted from their formation. Individual Churches were strengthened, they realized more vividly their spiritual fellowship and the common issues at stake.

The obvious benefits resulting from the formation and the work of the County Unions led to the suggestion that a still wider Union should be formed, of a national character. The Churches "had learnt by experience on more than one occasion how great a power they could

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exert when acting together. Singly they might be weak ; but collectively they were strong. And their leaders had discovered—even those of them whose loyalty to the principles of Congregationalism was most unbending—that independence and isolation are not the same thing.”¹ But even more than was the case with the formation of the County Unions, the suggestion was met with suspicion and opposition. In 1806 the idea was first seriously considered, some of the County Unions declaring in its favour. One or two abortive attempts at formation failed largely through the fear that the new Union might prejudice the independence of individual Churches. In 1832, however, the idea was at last realized and the National Union formed. It has continued ever since, increasing its scope and usefulness as the years have passed, and modifying its Constitution to meet enlarged opportunities.

This linking up of the Churches in County Associations and a National Union has led to an immense development and extension of Congregationalism in England. Subsidiary

¹ Dale, “ History of English Congregationalism,” p. 605.

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Organizations of various kinds and covering a wide area of effort have been formed. Missionary work, at home and abroad, is zealously supported ; a vigorous campaign for social betterment under the impulse of religion is maintained ; Institutional Mission Churches in great centres of population, aided largely by the County Unions, are reaching the unchurched masses in our large cities ; Societies for Church building and the aiding of weaker Churches are doing a valuable work in extending the scope of Congregationalism ; an energetic Temperance propaganda is undertaken ; several of the County Associations have an effective organization for educating the young people of the Churches in the principles of Congregationalism, and a National Young People's Union aims at drawing the younger members of our Congregations closer together and fostering a spirit of brotherhood amongst them. Sunday Schools are attached to our Churches and are being worked with a devotion and an increasing intelligence and sensitiveness to child needs. A Central Fund is in process of being raised, and is now well on

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toward completion, which will secure our Ministers from the distressing poverty which has been the unfortunate lot of many Pastors of the more needy Churches. The Memorial Hall in London, the head-quarters of the National Union, is, as it were, the nerve centre of the Denomination, directing the whole Body along the most fruitful lines. There are several Denominational Colleges in which men are prepared for the work of the Ministry and in which a high standard of scholarship is demanded. It is the fact that, at the present time, the average Congregational Minister stands as high in the matter of general culture and intellectual attainments as the average of any other section of the Christian Church. The time has quite gone by when the members of the Anglican Church, having first barred the doors of the Universities against the Nonconformists, could, with a not very chivalrous spirit, sneer at the intellectual deficiencies of Nonconformist Ministers. The Nonconformist Ministry of to-day is certainly, to say the least, not in the smallest degree inferior to the Anglican Ministry in this respect : it is possible that

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the average standard of scholarship required in the Congregational Colleges may be found to be higher than that required in the average Theological College of the Church of England.

All this is practically the achievement of the last hundred years. From a loosely related collection of separate Churches at the beginning of the nineteenth century there has grown up a strong, compact, effective, organization ; a spirit of union along with a careful cherishing of Congregational independence has welded the Congregational Churches into a magnificent instrument for doing the work of Jesus Christ in the world.

Congregationalism has been no less successful in its achievements in the larger world outside its own Church borders. It has made its influence felt in the State : some of the foremost champions of liberty in the great struggles against injustice, oppression, unrighteousness, class privilege, have been supplied by its Churches. Congregationalists have ever been found fighting in the van of the army of freedom. It was a Congregationalist who shattered for

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ever the tyranny of the "divine right of kings" and made it possible for England to become a self-governing nation and English citizens to live as free men. And ever since the days of Oliver Cromwell his brethren of the Congregational order have been faithful to the ideals of religious and political liberty which he set before the nation, and have cherished them, not for themselves and their own Churches alone, but for every citizen of whatever party or Church. In no section of the community is there a more thoroughgoing loyalty to King and Country, or a higher appreciation of, and quicker response to, the claims of citizenship upon the individual. Of those who serve their fellow-men in the broad fields of Parliamentary, Municipal, Philanthropic, Educational, activities, there are to be found, in an honourable proportion, those who profess the Congregational Faith. Our representatives are to be found among those who occupy the most distinguished positions in Art, Literature, Science. In Theology some of the foremost contributions to theological development have been made by Congregational scholars,

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while in the realm of Biblical criticism, a bold, but cautious, and sane moderatism has been the consistent attitude of our students. Among the great Captains of Industry, the Advocates of the Bar, the Judges on the Bench, the Magistracy, the Leaders and Organizers of the army of Labour, are to be found those who are faithful to the Congregational principles in which they have been born and on which their manhood has been nourished. Strangely enough, there are still to be found people who think of the Nonconformist as an ignorant and rather vulgar Philistine, without culture or refinement, unmarked by any intellectual distinction. Such people are living in an unreal world. They would be much astonished if they could but realize that in these matters the Congregationalist takes his place, by sheer merit, by the side of the most highly cultured members of a Church which, for centuries, endeavoured to exclude the Nonconformist from the legitimate opportunities for culture and improvement, and which, even to-day, tends to assume that all the higher qualities of culture and character are the

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exclusive possession of her members : they would be surprised if they could but realize to how great an extent the "light and leading" of our modern national life comes from a Congregational source. It is time that the mythical Nonconformist, as conceived by the prejudice of religious snobbery, should be frankly recognized as a delusion.

One great service which Congregationalism has rendered to the Christian Church is, that by its insistence on a return to the principles of the New Testament, it has recalled the Christian consciousness of the modern world to New Testament religion and re-asserted the evangelical type in religious life and thought. In centring the faith of the disciple on the personal Saviour and the historical Jesus of the Gospel records rather than on the Church, it has brought the disciple once again to the throne of the Redeemer Himself, and has swept on one side all the intricate and hampering machinery of human mediation which, for over ten centuries, barred the free access of the disciple to his Lord. There is no consistent place in Congrega-

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tionalism for either the sacerdotalism which sets up a priest as the sole dispenser of the means of grace and the necessary mediator between the disciple and Jesus Christ, or for the ultra-rationalism which refuses to recognize in Jesus Christ anything more than an intellectual analysis of the central figure of the New Testament may be able to reveal and account for. The evangelical revival of the eighteenth century was largely the product of this return to the Spiritual Saviour of the Gospel record, it was generated in the atmosphere of close personal contact with the Christ which is the characteristic atmosphere of Congregationalism. And in the nineteenth century it has rendered the same service. It has been one of the main centres of resistance to the neo-Catholic tendency concentrated in the Tractarian movement, and not less to the tendency to empty Christianity of all its more mystical and highly spiritual elements, produced by a one-sided application of the results of the intellectual and scientific revival of that century. It has demanded and secured the re-instatement of Jesus Christ on His throne, usurped for

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a millennium by the Church, and it claims for Him that absolute submission of the heart and life, of the emotions and intellect, which the first disciples cheerfully yielded Him, and therein found their true liberty and peace.

Congregationalism produces a distinct type of character. It was lately the fashion among a certain class of writers to refer in terms of contempt to what they were pleased to call "the Nonconformist Conscience." As so often happens, a term of reproach, coined by the enemies of a movement, becomes a title of honourable distinction. The cheap, gutter wit of Antioch, nearly two thousand years ago, thought to smother the new religion under what it imagined to be an opprobrious epithet ; the name it gave to the followers of the Nazarene has become, when it is rightly worn, the highest of all distinctions. The same result will follow the attempt of the gutter wit of modern England to kill by ridicule the virile and characteristic moral sentiment of English Nonconformity. Congregationalism, at any rate, is proud of its "Nonconformist Conscience." It is a

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conscience, the fine sensitiveness of which has done much to keep the life of the nation sweet and clean in times of national temptation, or in periods when the forces of evil have threatened to obscure the spiritual sanctions of life. The bitterness of the gibe aimed at it is the witness to its success. There may be some narrow-minded and Philistine Congregationalists whose outlook on life is pettifogging and provincial ; but in this respect Congregationalism does not stand alone, and perhaps the Anglican Church has least room to throw stones in this matter. The predominating Congregational type is quite otherwise ; it is broad-minded but restrained, it is intense but practical, it is spiritual but human, with its culture there is blended a saving element of mysticism. If it insists on the sharp lines of moral demands it concedes that ultimate responsibility of the individual conscience to God alone which avoids the self-righteousness of Pharisaism.

The outlook for Congregationalism is full of hope ; radiant possibilities open out before it in this first quarter of the twentieth

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century While preserving all that is spiritually essential in the teaching of our Reformation fathers, it is capable of adapting itself to the opportunities of the future. It has an abounding faith in its own principles. Conscious of the fellowship and inspiration of its Master, Jesus Christ, it is eager to retain a foremost place in the van of the army of the Lord. It is willing to make sacrifices for the Cause ; to accept and discharge its responsibilities. It is as resolute as ever for the principles for which it stands, at the same time it feels and responds to the yearning, manifesting itself in so many directions, for a vital reunion of the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the world. It is essentially Catholic in temper, with the Catholicism, not of Rome, or of any local designation, but the broader Catholicism of the New Testament.

There is growing up in Congregationalism a strong Church feeling. We realize ourselves, not simply as a Union of separate Churches, but as a Church Fellowship in which the rights of the individual Church are duly recognized along with a deep

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consciousness of a common Faith and a common practice. There is a rapidly growing feeling of homogeneity developing in our order which tends to transform the Congregational Union into the Congregational Church.

The tendency to draw together the various units of Congregationalism into a corporate association is of value in relation to its achievements, giving it a strategic centre from which it is able to carry out its own extension and to focus and develop its activities for the extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

And it is not less significant as marking a process of self-realization as a coherent and valid section of the universal Church of Christ. The idea of a United Congregational Church may be misunderstood and given a wrong direction, but if it be wisely developed, and in strict harmony with its fundamental spiritual conception of a Christian Church, the gradual evolution and realization of such an idea will mark the attainment of a consistent objective which has, all the way along, lain implicit

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within Congregationalism, and the legitimate consummation of the resurrection of the Congregational order in the sixteenth century. The more successfully we can develop the Catholic spirit within our own order the more favourable will be our position for negotiation in any possible movement for the reunion of Christendom in the future.

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